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ABSTRACT

Classroom techniques for teaching vocational English as a Second Language to hotel housekeepers are offered. The materials consist of a list of specific performance outcomes (use of content language to make verb/object combinations of hotel housekeeping tasks, use of functional language to create communication strategies for negotiation and planning), communication teaching points, and targeted SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) competencies, and a ten-step procedure for teachers to use in preparing and implementing an instructional unit. The steps cover such activities as anticipating student needs, preparing materials, building language use patterns in the classroom, forming student teams or groups, building discussions within groups, using independent study, setting goals, debriefing the groups, evaluating progress, and celebrating accomplishment. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Technical Assistance for
English Language Training Projects
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SCANS PLANS PORTFOLIO

Is That All There Is?

Allocating time and staff

by Erik Erikson, Curriculum Designer / Instructor,
Emily Griffith Opportunity School

Level: Multi-level

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Performance Outcomes:

1. Students will use content language to make verb/object combinations of tasks in a hotel housekeeping setting.
2. Students will use functional language to make communication strategies for negotiation and planning.

Communication Teaching Points:

The language objectives of this collaborative learning exercise are to build both content language and functional language. The content language will be the verb/object combinations of tasks in a hotel housekeeping setting. The functional language will be communication strategies for negotiation and planning.

SCANS Competencies:

Resources: Allocate time and staff
Interpersonal Skills: Working on teams, Teaching others, Leading, Negotiating, Working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds
Information: Organizing and maintaining files
Systems: Understanding organizational systems, Designing systems

Materials: colored paper (see Step 2)

Step 1 - Prepare yourself.

Collaborative learning exercises are by their very nature time-consuming in preparation. A well-organized learning task will encourage the students to find their own path toward a stated goal and to discover as much as possible along the way. With some detailed planning on the instructor's part, the students can be independent as well as interdependent during their journey. Once the destination is reached, the students will have pride in having made the trip by using their own resources. In addition, having taken the trip together once, it will be that much easier to collaborate in the future. The more familiar the students are with the process, the more confidence they will have the next time and the more confidence the teacher will have in future journeys.

We are English teachers and our primary goal is to teach language. Since language is a social endeavor, it follows that learning language needs to be done in a social context. The context in which we teach language for employability needs to be done in a way that closely mirrors the reality of work culture. Students in a classroom are sheltered from many of the demands they find on the job i.e. physical labor, irate customers, noise and smell. However, other demands as real as those of the workplace certainly exist in the classroom whether we want to believe it or not: personality conflicts, evaluation, time pressures, language frustration and confusion. In order to create an atmosphere that more closely reflects the work context, it's advisable to be less demanding than a boss but have tougher expectations than a teacher.

Step 2 - Prepare the materials.

Packet A
Each group will need:
1 set of functional language cards on colored paper:

"How do you spell _____?"
"Your turn."
"I don't think so."
"Is this right?"
"Show me."
"Are you finished?"
"Please say it again."
"What does that mean?"
" I don't understand."

Packet B
Each group will need:
1 set of verb/object cards on a differently colored paper: (Use only as many of these cards as your students can handle.)

vacuum the carpet
dust the furniture
empty the trash
change the linens
make the bed
clean the bathtub
take a 15 minute break
take a 30 minute lunch break
stock the cart
stock the cart again
take the dirty linens to the laundry
take the trash outside
clean the toilet
clean the sink
wash the floor
clean the mirror
restock the towels
restock the soap
open the curtains
change the light bulb
dust the window sills
replace the shower curtain
wipe off the vanity
polish the fixtures
replace the trash bag

Packet C
Each group will need:
1 chart with ~20 rows and 3 columns (make several copies in case of big mistakes).

Label column 1 "What do you do?"
Label column 2 "How long does it take?"
Label column 3 "When do you finish?"

Packet D
Each group will need:
1 group feedback/evaluation form with a Likert scale e.g. "excellent", "good", "so-so"; 1-5; A-F.
Items to be judged may include:

The group worked together.
The group spoke English.
The group members helped each other.
The group finished on time.
The group was friendly and polite.

Each student will need:
1 individual feedback/evaluation form with a Likert scale.
Items to be judged may include:

I worked with the group.
I spoke English.
I helped the group.
I liked working with the group.
I was friendly and polite.

Step 3 - Build language.

Before beginning the collaborative learning exercise, it's essential to provide the students with ample practice using the simple functional phrases. This needs to be done on a regular, conscious and even daily basis. A common technique is to make extra large cards with the functional phrases from Packet A and to put them one-by-one on the board for explicit use and practice throughout lessons.

A consistent demonstration of these and other functional phrases will help the students get into the habit of using them without reservations.

Step 4 - Build teams/groups.

The formation of teams and groups can be an engineering feat in itself. In an ideal world, each member of the team would speak a different first language and each would contribute equally to the discussion and task. In such a scenario, there would be a guarantee of discussion in English and little conflict. In reality, it may be necessary to discuss expected behaviors. The instructor and students may also need to understand that there is an expectation of substantive and procedural conflict inherent in collaboration.

You, the teacher, probably know your students well enough to build teams. There are, however, some factors to take into consideration. Are the members of the team replicating their own cultural or social strata? Are there generational or gender differences predicting outcomes? Role assignments can be a practical solution to these possible problems. In a team of four people, assign the following roles: Reporter, recorder, facilitator and time-keeper. The reporter will be responsible for giving an oral synopsis at the end of the discussion. The reporter must pay attention and is expected to get as much accurate information as possible from each member of the group. The recorder is responsible for taking notes and making sure that the reporter is prepared. The facilitator makes sure that everyone participates and that no one person dominates the discussion. The time-keeper is responsible for moving things along and to not spend too much time on one particular task. If these role titles are difficult for the students to understand, assign the respective roles as: Speaker, secretary, manager, police.

When the team is established, first make sure that each student's name is known within the team. Then, ask the team to give itself a name and to explain the name. This encourages a unified identity that goes beyond the differences of the individuals.

Step 5 - Build schema.

The next exercise in collaboration is to draw on and share the background and experiences of the members of the team in order to focus on the upcoming task and begin peer teaching. Using Packet A, ask the students to put the functional language cards on the table and to practice for a minute. Then pose the question for oral discussion within the groups, "What work do you do on your day(s) off?" Introduce/review simple present tense grammar (action performed on a regular basis) using a couple of examples from your own life.

Set a time limit of several minutes for the students to discuss their activities. Discourage writing or the use of dictionaries at this point.

Circulate and monitor the discussions, making sure that the facilitator and time-keeper are, in fact, doing their jobs. Check for use of the functional language and point to the cards. Also be aware that some students may list recreation as "work" - make the distinction clearer for them.

When the time is up, ask the students within each group to agree on which work done on days off is the most important. Ask for a short prioritized list (perhaps 3 items) from each group. Set a time limit of several minutes. Circulate to make sure the recorder is recording and that the reporter is preparing.

After several minutes, ask the reporter from each group to speak to the whole group while you, the instructor, write the reports on the board. Discuss the prioritized lists in a whole-group setting. The students are now focused on a particular idea.

Step 6 - Allow interdependent study.

So far, several tasks have been completed. The teams have been established and are functioning semi-independently, the students are aware of their roles and responsibilities, and they are focused on a type of content. The next step is to discuss the upcoming situation.

Show a picture of a hotel housekeeper and make sure the students understand the term. Distribute Packet B (vacuum the carpet, dust the furniture, etc.). Once again, discourage writing and the use of dictionaries. Ask the students to place all the cards on the table and, within the group, practice "Show me" i.e. pantomime. Emphasize the importance of the functional language cards. Allow the students some time for peer teaching and exploration. Ask the students to group the cards into 2 piles of "We understand" and "We don't understand". Address only the cards in the latter of the 2 piles and show/explain the vocabulary as necessary. At this point allow the students to write and use dictionaries, if necessary. Shuffle the cards and divide them among the members of the group. Ask each student within the group to, one by one, look at a card and to pantomime the verb/object combination while the other students look at the lists in their notebooks to identity the action. When the content language is sufficiently practiced, move onto the next step.

Step - 7 Set goals.

Introduce the project that the students will be engaged in.

Go back to the activities that the students said they perform on their days off and practice the questions "What do you do?" and "How long does it take?" Introduce/review the time prepositional phrases "for x minutes", "for x hours".

Explain that a hotel housekeeper must perform all of the duties written on the cards. In fact, a hotel housekeeper has to do all these things repeatedly in a number of rooms everyday. Also mention the local wages for such a job and agree that, yes, it's difficult. Continue that it's the assignment of each group to come up with a plan to schedule the duties for the day.

Ask each group to organize the verb/object cards from Packet B in the order in which they think the duties should be performed. Once again draw attention to the functional language cards and ask the students to practice using them in their discussion. Make sure that the assigned roles are being played out. When the group has reached consensus, ask the recorder to write the information in the column labeled "What do you do?" from Packet C.

By now the students are probably already on the task of labeling column 2 "How long does it take?" from Packet C. If collaboration is indeed working, they will need no prompt to do so.

When the recorder finishes that task, explain to the students that a hotel housekeeper usually begins work at 7:30 a.m. Using that as a starting point, ask the students to fill in each row of column 3 "When do you finish?" by calculating the times. This job responsibility is usually reserved for the loudest member of the group in order to calm the atmosphere for a moment. At this point, ask the reporter from each group to explain how long it takes to take care of one room in the hotel. Discuss the answers in the whole group setting and calculate how many rooms can be cleaned in an eight-hour shift. No matter what the answers, claim that management demands that more rooms be cleaned per day. Ask the time-keeper in each group to decide which tasks can be done more quickly in order to save time and to write down how much time could be saved. Each member of the group then signs the chart to signify agreement.

Step 8 - Debriefing.

In a whole group, ask the students how they feel: angry, sad, happy, tired, etc. Elicit comments on the reasons they feel that way. Congratulate them on completing the task well.

Step 9 - Evaluation.

Ask the reporter in each group to listen to the group discuss the evaluation comments in Packet D and to fill it out. Again ask for the signature of each member of the group.

Give each student an individual evaluation form from Packet D, ask for a signature upon completion.

Step 10 - Celebrate the accomplishment!

Give out chocolate! Take an extra long break! Give "high 5's"! Explain that the process/technique will be done again in the future.